INTRODUCTION – I

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> I object to all of you (Horney, Jones, Rado, etc.,) to the extent that you do not distinguish more clearly and cleanly between what is psychic and what is biological, that you try to establish a neat parallelism between the two and that you, motivated by such intent, unthinkingly construe psychic facts which are unprovable and that you, in the process of doing so, must declare as reactive or regressive much that without doubt is primary. Of course, these reproaches must remain obscure. In addition, I would only like to emphasize that we must keep psychoanalysis separate from biology just as we have kept it separate from anatomy and physiology . . . .
>
> (Freud, letter to Carl Müller-Braunschweig, 1935)

Jacques Lacan dedicated himself to the task of refinding and reformulating the work of Sigmund Freud. Psychoanalytic theory today is a variegated discipline. There are contradictions within Freud's writings and subsequent analysts have developed one aspect and rejected another, thereby using one theme as a jumping off point for a new theory. Lacan conceived his own project differently: despite the contradictions and impasses, there is a coherent theorist in Freud whose ideas do not need to be diverged from; rather they should be set within a cohesive framework that they anticipated but which, for historical reasons, Freud himself could not formulate. The development of linguistic science provides this framework.

It is certainly arguable that from the way psychoanalysis has grown during this century we have gained a wider range of therapeutic understanding and the multiplication of fruitful ideas, but we have lost the possibility of a clarification of an essential theory. To say that Freud's work contains contradictions should not be the equivalent of arguing that it is heterogeneous and that it is therefore legitimate for everyone to take their pick and develop it as they wish. Lacan set his face against

what he saw as such illegitimate and over-tolerant notions of more-or-less peacefully co-existent lines of psychoanalytic thought. From the outset he went back to Freud's basic concepts. Here, initially, there is agreement among psychoanalysts as to the terrain on which they work: psychoanalysis is about human sexuality and the unconscious.

The psychoanalytic concept of sexuality confronts head-on all popular conceptions. It can never be equated with genitality nor is it the simple expression of a biological drive. It is always psychosexuality, a system of conscious and unconscious human fantasies involving a range of excitations and activities that produce pleasure beyond the satisfaction of any basic physiological need. It arises from various sources, seeks satisfaction in many different ways and makes use of many diverse objects for its aim of achieving pleasure. Only with great difficulty and then never perfectly does it move from being a drive with many component parts – a single 'libido' expressed through very different phenomena – to being what is normally understood as sexuality, something which *appears* to be a unified instinct in which genitality predominates.

For all psychoanalysts the development of the human subject, its unconscious and its sexuality go hand-in-hand, they are causatively intertwined. A psychoanalyst could not subscribe to a currently popular sociological distinction in which a person is born with their biological gender to which society – general environment, parents, education, the media – adds a socially defined sex, masculine or feminine. Psychoanalysis cannot make such a distinction: a person is formed *through* their sexuality, it could not be 'added' to him or her. The ways in which psychosexuality and the unconscious are closely bound together are complex, but most obviously, the unconscious contains wishes that cannot be satisfied and hence have been repressed. Predominant among such wishes are the tabooed incestuous desires of childhood.

The unconscious contains all that has been repressed from consciousness, but it is not co-terminous with this. There is an evident lack of continuity in conscious psychic life – psychoanalysis concerns itself with the gaps. Freud's contribution was to demonstrate that these gaps constitute a system that is entirely different from that of consciousness: the unconscious. The unconscious is governed by its own laws, its images do not follow

each other as in the sequential logic of consciousness but by condensing onto each other or by being displaced onto something else. Because it is *unconscious*, direct access to it is impossible but its manifestations are apparent most notably in dreams, everyday slips, jokes, the 'normal' splits and divisions within the human subject and in psychotic and neurotic behaviour.

Lacan believed that though all psychoanalysts subscribe to the importance of the unconscious and to the privileged position of sexuality within the development of the human subject, the way in which many post-Freudians have elaborated their theories ultimately reduces or distorts the significance even of these fundamental postulates. To Lacan most current psychoanalytic thinking is tangled up in popular ideologies and thus misses the revolutionary nature of Freud's work and replicates what it is its task to expose: psychoanalysis should not subscribe to ideas about how men and women do or should live as sexually differentiated beings, but instead it should analyse how they come to be such beings in the first place.

Lacan's work has always to be seen within the context of a two-pronged polemic. Most simply he took on, sometimes by explicit, named reference, more often by indirect insult or implication, almost all analysts of note since Freud. Both internationally and within France, Lacan's history was one of repeated institutional conflict and ceaseless opposition to established views. Outside France his targets were the theories of American dominated ego-psychology, of Melanie Klein and of object-relations analysts,[1] most notably, Balint, Fairbairn and Winnicott. Lacan was more kindly disposed to the clinical insights of some than he was towards those of others but he argued that they are all guilty of misunderstanding and debasing the theory inaugurated by Freud.

[1] It is important to keep psychoanalytic object-relations theory distinct from psychological or sociological accounts to which it might bear some superficial resemblance. The 'object' in question is, of course, the human object; but, more importantly, it is its *internalisation* by the subject that is the issue at stake. It is never only an actual object but also always the fantasies of it, that shape it as an internal image for the subject. Object-relations theory originated as an attempt to shift psychoanalysis away from a one-person to a two-person theory stressing that there is always a relationship between at least two people. In object-relations theory the object is active in relation to the subject who is formed in complex interaction with it. This contrasts with Lacan's account of the object, see p. 31 below.

The second prong of Lacan's polemic relates to a mistake he felt Freud himself initiated: paradoxically, while cherishing the wounds of his rejection by a lay and medical public, Freud strove to be easily understood. The preposterous difficulty of Lacan's style is a challenge to easy comprehension, to the popularisation and secularisation of psychoanalysis as it has occurred most notably in North America. Psychoanalysis should aim to show us that we do not know those things we think we do; it therefore cannot assault our popular conceptions by using the very idiom it is intended to confront; a challenge to ideology cannot rest on a linguistic appeal to that same ideology. The dominant ideology of today, as it was of the time and place when psychoanalysis was established, is humanism. Humanism believes that man is at the centre of his own history and of himself; he is a subject more or less in control of his own actions, exercising choice. Humanistic psychoanalytic practice is in danger of seeing the patient as someone who has lost control and a sense of a real or true self (identity) and it aims to help regain these. The matter and manner of all Lacan's work challenges this notion of the human subject: there is none such. In the sentence structure of most of his public addresses and of his written style the grammatical subject is either absent or shifting or, at most, only passively constructed. At this level, the difficulty of Lacan's style could be said to mirror his theory.

The humanistic conception of mankind assumes that the subject exists from the beginning. At least by implication ego psychologists, object-relations theorists and Kleinians base themselves on the same premise. For this reason, Lacan considers that in the last analysis, they are more ideologues than theorists of psychoanalysis. In the Freud that Lacan uses, neither the unconscious nor sexuality can in any degree be pre-given facts, they are constructions; that is they are objects with histories and the human subject itself is only formed within these histories. It is this history of the human subject in its generality (human history) and its particularity (the specific life of the individual) as it manifests itself in unconscious fantasy life, that psychoanalysis traces. This immediately establishes the framework within which the whole question of female sexuality can be understood. As Freud put it: 'In conformity with its peculiar nature, psychoanalysis does not try to describe what a woman is – that would be a task it could scarcely perform – but sets about enquiring *how she*

comes into being' (Freud, XXII, 1933, p. 116: italics added).

Lacan dedicated himself to reorienting psychoanalysis to its task of deciphering the ways in which the human subject is constructed – how it comes into being – out of the small human animal. It is because of this aim that Lacan offered psychoanalytic theory the new science of linguistics which he developed and altered in relation to the concept of subjectivity. The human animal is born into language and it is within the terms of language that the human subject is constructed. Language does not arise from within the individual, it is always out there in the world outside, lying in wait for the neonate. Language always 'belongs' to another person. The human subject is created from a general law that comes to it from outside itself and through the speech of other people, though this speech in its turn must relate to the general law.

Lacan's human subject is the obverse of the humanists'. His subject is not an entity with an identity, but a being created in the fissure of a radical split. The identity that seems to be that of the subject is in fact a mirage arising when the subject forms an image of itself by identifying with others' perception of it. When the human baby learns to say 'me' and 'I' it is only acquiring these designations from someone and somewhere else, from the world which perceives and names it. The terms are not constants in harmony with its own body, they do not come from within itself but from elsewhere. Lacan's human subject is not a 'divided self' (Laing) that in a different society could be made whole, but a self which is only actually and necessarily created within a split – a being that can only conceptualise itself when it is mirrored back to itself from the position of another's desire. The unconscious where the subject is not itself, where the 'I' of a dream can be someone else and the object and subject shift and change places, bears perpetual witness to this primordial splitting.

It is here too, within the necessary divisions that language imposes on humans, that sexuality must also find its place. The psychoanalytic notion that sexual wishes are tabooed and hence repressed into the unconscious is frequently understood in a sociological sense (Malinowski, Reich, Marcuse . . .). The implication is that a truly permissive society would not forbid what is now sexually taboo and it would thus liberate men and women from the sense that they are alienated from their own sexuality. But against such prevalent notions, Lacan states that desire itself,

and with it, sexual desire, can only exist by virtue of its alienation. Freud describes how the baby can be observed to hallucinate the milk that has been withdrawn from it and the infant to play throwing-away games to overcome the trauma of its mother's necessary departures. Lacan uses these instances to show that the object that is longed for only comes into existence *as an object* when it is lost to the baby or infant. Thus any satisfaction that might subsequently be attained will always contain this loss within it. Lacan refers to this dimension as 'desire'. The baby's need can be met, its demand responded to, but its desire only exists because of the initial failure of satisfaction. Desire persists as an effect of a primordial absence and it therefore indicates that, in this area, there is something fundamentally impossible about satisfaction itself. It is this process that, to Lacan, lies behind Freud's statement that 'We must reckon with the possibility that something in the nature of the sexual instinct itself is unfavourable to the realisation of complete satisfaction' (Freud, XI, 1912, pp. 188–9).

This account of sexual desire led Lacan, as it led Freud, to his adamant rejection of any theory of the difference between the sexes in terms of pre-given male or female entities which complete and satisfy each other. Sexual difference can only be the consequence of a division; without this division it would cease to exist. But it must exist because no human being can become a subject outside the division into two sexes. One must take up a position as either a man or a woman. Such a position is by no means identical with one's biological sexual characteristics, nor is it a position of which one can be very confident – as the psychoanalytical experience demonstrates.

The question as to what created this difference between the sexes was a central debate among psychoanalysts in the twenties and thirties. Lacan returned to this debate as a focal point for what he considered had gone wrong with psychoanalytic theory subsequently. Again Lacan underscored and reformulated the position that Freud took up in this debate. Freud always insisted that it was the presence or absence of the phallus and *nothing else* that marked the distinction between the sexes. Others disagreed. Retrospectively the key concept of the debate becomes transparently clear: it is the castration complex. In Freud's eventual schema, the little boy and the little girl initially share the same sexual history which he terms 'masculine'. They start by desiring

their first object: the mother. In fantasy this means having the phallus which is the object of the mother's desire (the phallic phase). This position is forbidden (the castration complex) and the differentiation of the sexes occurs. The castration complex ends the boy's Oedipus complex (his love for his mother) and inaugurates for the girl the one that is specifically hers: she will transfer her object love to her father who seems to have the phallus and identify with her mother who, to the girl's fury, has not. Henceforth the girl will desire to have the phallus and the boy will struggle to represent it. For this reason, for both sexes, this is the insoluble desire of their lives and, for Freud, because its entire point is precisely to be insoluble, it is the bedrock beneath which psychoanalysis cannot reach. Psychoanalysis cannot give the human subject that which it is its fate, as the condition of its subjecthood, to do without:

> At no other point in one's analytic work does one suffer more from an oppressive feeling that all one's repeated efforts have been in vain, and from a suspicion that one has been 'preaching to the winds', than when one is trying to persuade a woman to abandon her wish for a penis on the ground of its being unrealizable. (Freud, XXIII, 1937, p. 252)

There was great opposition to Freud's concept of the girl's phallic phase and to the significance he eventually gave to the castration complex. Lacan returns to the key concept of the debate, to the castration complex and, within its terms, the meaning of the phallus. He takes them as the bedrock of subjectivity itself and of the place of sexuality within it. The selection of the phallus as the mark around which subjectivity and sexuality are constructed reveals, precisely, that they are constructed, in a division which is both arbitrary and alienating. In Lacan's reading of Freud, the threat of castration is not something that has been done to an already existent girl subject or that could be done to an already existent boy subject; it is, as it was for Freud, what 'makes' the girl a girl and the boy a boy, in a division that is both essential and precarious.

The question of the castration complex split psychoanalysts. At the time of the great debate in the mid-twenties, the issue was framed as the nature of female sexuality but underlying that are the preceding disagreements on castration anxiety. In fact all sub-

sequent work on female sexuality and on the construction of sexual difference stems from the various places accorded to the concept of the castration complex. It stands as the often silent centre of all the theories that flourished in the decades before the war; the effects of its acceptance or rejection are still being felt.

The arguments on female sexuality are usually referred to as the 'Freud–Jones debate'. In the presentation that follows I have not adhered to the privileging of Jones's work. This is partly because it is the subject of a detailed examination in one of the texts translated here (P, pp. 99–122); but more importantly because the purpose of my selection is to draw attention to the general nature of the problem and present Freud's work from the perspective to which Lacan returns. I shall leave aside details of differences between analysts; rank those otherwise different on the same side; omit the arguments of any analyst, major or minor, whose contribution in this area does not affect the general proposition – the selection will seem arbitrary from any viewpoint other than this one. Individual authors on the same side differ from one another, are inconsistent with themselves or change their minds, but these factors fade before the more fundamental division around the concept of castration. In the final analysis the debate relates to the question of the psychoanalytic understanding both of sexuality and of the unconscious and brings to the fore issues of the relationship between psychoanalysis and biology and sociology. Is it biology, environmental influence, object-relations or the castration complex that makes for the psychological distinction between the sexes?

Freud, and Lacan after him, are both accused of producing phallocentric theories – of taking man as the norm and woman as what is different therefrom. Freud's opponents are concerned to right the balance and develop theories that explain how men and women in their psychosexuality are equal but different. To both Freud and Lacan their task is not to produce justice but to explain this difference which to them uses, not the man, but the phallus to which the man has to lay claim, as its key term. But it is because Freud's position only clearly became this in his later work that Lacan insists we have to 're-read it', giving his theory the significance and coherence which otherwise it lacks.

Although Lacan takes no note of it, there is, in fact, much in Freud's early work, written long before the great debate, that later analysts could use as a starting-point for their descriptions of

the equal, parallel development of the sexes. Divisions within writings on the subject since, in many ways, can be seen in terms of this original divergence within Freud's own work.

Freud's work on this subject can be divided into two periods. In the first phase what he had to say about female sexuality arises in the context of his defence of his theory of the fact and the importance of infantile sexuality in general before a public he considered hostile to his discoveries. This first phase stretches from the 1890s to somewhere between 1916 and 1919. The second phase lasts from 1920 until his final work published posthumously in 1940. In this second period he is concerned with elaborating and defending his understanding of sexuality in relation to the particular question of the nature of the difference between the sexes. By this time what he wrote was part of a discussion within the psychoanalytic movement itself.

In the first phase there is a major contradiction in Freud's work which was never brought out into the open. It was immensely important for the later theories of female sexuality. In this period Freud's few explicit ideas about female sexuality revolve around his references to the Oedipus complex. The essence of the Oedipus complex is first mentioned in his published writings in a passing reference to *Oedipus Rex* in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), in 1910 it is named as the Oedipus complex and by 1919, without much theoretical but with a great deal of clinical expansion (most notably in the case of Little Hans), it has become the foundation stone of psychoanalysis. The particular ways in which the Oedipus complex appears and is resolved characterise different types of normality and pathology; its event and resolution explain the human subject and human desire. But the Oedipus complex of this early period is a simple set of relationships in which the child desires the parent of the opposite sex and feels hostile rivalry for the one of the same sex as itself. There is a symmetrical correspondence in the history of the boy and the girl. Thus in 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria' (1905) Freud writes: 'Distinct traces are probably to be found in most people of an early partiality of this kind – on the part of a daughter for her father, or on the part of a son for his mother' (Freud, VII, 1905, p. 56), and the entire manifest interpretation of Dora's hysteria is in terms of her infantile Oedipal love for her father, and his substitute in the present, Herr K. Or, in 'Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's *Gradiva*': 'it is the general rule for a

normally constituted girl to turn her affection towards her father in the first instance' (Freud, IX, 1906/7, p. 33). And so on. At the root of Freud's assigning parallel Oedipal roles to girls and boys lies a notion of a natural and normative heterosexual attraction; a notion which was to be re-assumed by many psychoanalysts later. Here, in Freud's early work, it is as though the concept of an Oedipus complex – of a fundamental wish for incest – was so radical that if one was to argue at all for the child's incestuous desires then at least these had better be for the parent of the opposite sex. Thus it was because Freud had to defend his thesis of infantile incestuous sexuality so strenuously against both external opposition and his own reluctance to accept the idea, that the very radicalism of the concept of the Oedipus complex acted as a conservative 'stopper' when it came to understanding the difference between the sexes. Here Freud's position is a conventional one: boys will be boys and love women, girls will be girls and love men. Running counter, however, to the normative implications of sexual symmetry in the Oedipal situation are several themes. Most importantly there is both the structure and the argument of the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905). Lacan returns to this work reading the concept of the sexual drive that he finds latent there through the light shed on it in Freud's later paper on 'Instincts and Their Vicissitudes' (1915).

The *Three Essays* is the revolutionary founding work for the psychoanalytic concept of sexuality. Freud starts the book with chapters on sexual aberration. He uses homosexuality to demonstrate that for the sexual drive there is no natural, automatic object; he uses the perversions to show that it has no fixed aim. As normality is itself an 'ideal fiction' and there is no qualitative distinction between abnormality and normality, innate factors cannot account for the situation and any notion of the drive as simply innate is therefore untenable. What this means is that the understanding of the drive itself is at stake. The drive (or 'instinct' in the Standard Edition translation), is something on the border between the mental and the physical. Later Freud formulated the relationship as one in which the somatic urge delegated its task to a psychical representative. In his paper, 'The Unconscious', he wrote:

> An instinct can never become an object of consciousness – only the idea that represents the instinct can. Even in the unconscious, moreover, an instinct cannot be represented otherwise than by an idea . . . . When we nevertheless speak of an unconscious instinctual impulse or of a repressed instinctual impulse . . . we can only mean an instinctual impulse the ideational representative of which is unconscious. (Freud, XIV, 1915, p. 177)

There is never a causal relationship between the biological urge and its representative: we cannot perceive an activity and deduce behind it a corresponding physical motive force. The sexual drive is never an entity, it is polymorphous, its aim is variable, its object contingent. Lacan argues that the *Three Essays* demonstrate that Freud was already aware that for mankind the drive is almost the *opposite* of an animal instinct that knows and gets its satisfying object. On the other hand, object-relations theorists contend that Freud suggested that the sexual drive was a direct outgrowth of the first satisfying relationship with the mother; it repeats the wish to suck or be held. The baby thus has a first 'part-object' in the breast and later an object in the mother whom it will love pre-Oedipally and then as a 'whole object' Oedipally. Later the sexual drive of the adult will seek out a substitute for this which, if it is good enough, can and will satisfy it.

Though the lack of clarity in some parts of the *Three Essays* could, perhaps, be held responsible for this diversity of interpretation and for the new dominant strand of humanism that Lacan deplores, yet there is absolutely nothing within the essays that is compatible with any notion of natural heterosexual attraction or with the Oedipus complex as it is formulated in Freud's other writing of this period. The structure and content of the *Three Essays* erodes any idea of normative sexuality. By deduction, if no heterosexual attraction is ordained in nature, there can be no genderised sex – there cannot at the outset be a male or female person in a psychological sense.

In the case of 'Dora', Freud assumed that had Dora not been an hysteric she would have been naturally attracted to her suitor, Herr K, just as she had been attracted to her father when she was a small child. In other words, she would have had a natural female Oedipus complex. But the footnotes, written subsequently, tell another story: Dora's relationship to her father had been one not only of attraction but also of identification with him. In terms of her sexual desire, Dora is a man adoring a woman. To ascribe the

situation to Dora's hysteria would be to beg the whole founding question of psychoanalysis. Hysteria is not produced by any innate disposition. It follows that if Dora can have a masculine identification there can be no natural or automatic heterosexual drive.

Until the 1920s Freud solved this problem by his notion of bisexuality. 'Bisexuality' likewise enabled him to avoid what would otherwise have been too blatant a contradiction in his position: thus he argued that the too neat parallelism of the boy's and girl's Oedipal situations, the dilemma of Dora, the presence of homosexuality, could all be accounted for by the fact that the boy has a bit of the female, the girl of the male. This saves the Oedipus complex from the crudity of gender determinism – but at a price. If, as Freud insists, the notion of bisexuality is not to be a purely biological one, whence does it arise? Later analysts who largely preserved Freud's early use of the term, did relate bisexuality to the duplications of anatomy or based it on simple identification: the boy partly identified with the mother, the girl partly with the father. For Freud, when later he reformulated the Oedipus complex, 'bisexuality' shifted its meaning and came to stand for the very uncertainty of sexual division itself.

Without question during this first period, Freud's position is highly contradictory. His discovery of the Oedipus complex led him to assume a natural heterosexuality. The rest of his work argued against this possibility as the very premise of a psychoanalytic understanding of sexuality. There is no reference to the Oedipus complex or the positions it assumes in the *Three Essays* and by this omission he was able to avoid recognising the contradiction within his theses, though the essays bear its mark within some of the confusing statements they contain.

By about 1915 it seems that Freud was aware that his theory of the Oedipus complex and of the nature of sexuality could not satisfactorily explain the difference between the sexes. Freud never explicitly stated his difficulties (as he did in other areas of work), but in 1915, he added a series of footnotes to the *Three Essays* which are almost all about the problem of defining masculinity and femininity. Other writers – notably Jung – had taken Freud's ideas on the Oedipus complex as they were expressed at the time, to their logical conclusion and in establishing a definite parity between the sexes had re-named the girl's Oedipal conflict, the Electra complex. Whether or not it was this

work – Freud rejected the Electra complex from the outset – or whether it was the dawning awareness of the unsatisfactory nature of his own position that provoked Freud to re-think the issue cannot be established; but something made him look more intensively at the question of the difference between the sexes.

One concept, also added in 1915 to the *Three Essays*, marks both the turning point in Freud's own understanding of the differences between men and women, and also the focal point of the conflict that emerges between his views and those of most other analysts on the question. This concept is the castration complex.

During the first phase of Freud's work we can see the idea of the castration complex gradually gain momentum. It was discussed in 'On the Sexual Theories of Children' (1908), crucially important in the analysis of Little Hans (1909), yet when he wrote 'On Narcissism: An Introduction' in 1914 Freud was still uncertain as to whether or not it was a universal occurrence. But in 1915 it starts to assume a larger and larger part. By 1924, in the paper on 'The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex' the castration complex has emerged as a central concept. In his autobiography of 1925, Freud wrote: 'The *castration complex* is of the profoundest importance in the formation alike of character and of neurosis' (Freud, XX, 1925, p. 37). He made it the focal point of the acquisition of culture; it operates as a law whereby men and women assume their humanity and, inextricably bound up with this, it gives the human meaning of the distinction between the sexes.

The castration complex in Freud's writings is very closely connected with his interest in man's prehistory. It is unnecessary to enumerate Freud's dubious anthropological reconstructions in this field; what is of relevance is the importance he gave to an *event* in man's personal and social history. It is well known that before he recognised the significance of fantasy and of infantile sexuality, Freud believed the tales his hysterical patients told him of their seductions by their fathers. Although Freud abandoned the particular event of paternal seduction as either likely or, more important, causative, he retained the notion of an event, prehistorical or actual. Something intruded from without into the child's world. Something that was not innate but came from outside, from history or prehistory. This 'event' was to be the paternal threat of castration.

That the castration complex operates as an external event, a law, can be seen too from a related preoccupation of Freud's. Some time around 1916, Freud became interested in the ideas of Lamarck. This interest is most often regarded, with condescension, as an instance of Freud's nineteenth-century scientific anachronism. But in fact by 1916 Lamarck was already outmoded and it is clear that Freud's interest arose not from ignorance but from the need to account for something that he observed but could not theorise. The question at stake was: how does the individual acquire the whole essential history of being human within the first few short years of its life? Lamarckian notions of cultural inheritance offered Freud a possible solution to the problem. In rejecting the idea of cultural inheritance, Freud's opponents may have been refusing a false solution but in doing so they missed the urgency of the question and thereby failed to confront the problem of how the child acquires so early and so rapidly its knowledge of human law. Karen Horney's 'culturalist' stress – her emphasis on the influence of society – was an attempt to put things right, but it failed because it necessitated an implicit assumption that the human subject could be set apart from society and was not constructed solely within it: the child and society were separate entities mutually affecting each other. For Horney there are men and women (boys and girls) already there; in this she takes for granted exactly that which she intends to explain.

Freud's concept of the castration complex completely shifted the implications of the Oedipus complex and altered the meaning of bisexuality. Before the castration complex was given its full significance, it seems that the Oedipus complex dissolved naturally, a passing developmental stage. Once the castration complex is postulated it is this alone that shatters the Oedipus complex. The castration complex institutes the superego as its representative and as representative thereby of the law. Together with the organising role of the Oedipus complex in relation to desire, the castration complex governs the position of each person in the triangle of father, mother and child; in the way it does this, it embodies the law that founds the human order itself. Thus the question of castration, of sexual difference as the product of a division, and the concept of an historical and symbolic order, all begin, tentatively, to come together. It is on their interdependence that Lacan bases his theories in the texts

that follow.

When Freud started to elevate the concept of castration to its theoretical heights, resistance started. It seems that infantile sexuality and the Oedipus complex were unpalatable ideas for many outside the psychoanalytical movement, yet it would appear that there was something even more inherently unacceptable about the notion of a castration complex and what it assumed in the girl child, penis envy, even for psychoanalysts. After this point, Freud's emphasis on the importance of the castration complex comes not only from his clinical observations, his growing awareness of the contradictions of his own work, his increasing interest in the foundations of human history, but to a degree as a response to the work of his colleagues.

Lou Andreas-Salomé, van Ophuijsen, then Karl Abraham and Auguste Starcke in 1921 initiate the response to the notion. Franz Alexander, Otto Rank, Carl Müller-Braunschweig, and Josine Müller continue it until the names that are more famous in this context – Karen Horney, Melanie Klein, Lampl-de Groot, Helene Deutsch, Ernest Jones – are added in the mid-twenties and thirties. Others join in: Fenichel, Rado, Marjorie Brierley, Joan Rivière, Ruth Mack Brunswick, but by 1935 the positions have clarified and the terms of the discussion on sexual differences do not change importantly, though the content that goes to fill out the argument does so.

Karl Abraham's work is crucial. He died before the great debate was in full flow, but his ideas, though often not acknowledged, were central to it – not least because most of Freud's opponents believed that Abraham's views were representative of Freud's. As Abraham is ostensibly amplifying Freud's work and writing in support of the concept of the castration complex, this was an understandable but completely mistaken assumption. In their letters Freud and Abraham are always agreeing most politely with one another and this makes it rather hard to elucidate the highly significant differences between them. One difference is that Freud argues that girls envy the phallus, Karl Abraham believes that both sexes in parallel fashion fear castration – which he describes as lack of sexual potency.[2] In

[2] This difference was to be taken further by other writers, most notably by Ernest Jones who in arguing against the specificity of phallic castration and for the general fear of an extinction of sexual desire, coined the term

Abraham's thesis, boys and girls – because they are already different – respond differently to an identical experience; in Freud the same experience distinguishes them. By implication for Abraham, but not for Freud, by the time of the castration complex there must already be 'boys' and 'girls'. This important distinction apart, the real divergence between Abraham's arguments and those of Freud can best be glimpsed through the shift of emphasis. In the work of both writers incest is taboo ('castration'); but only for Freud must there be someone around to forbid it: prohibition is in the air.

In Freud's work, with its emphasis on the castration complex as the source of the law, it is the father who already possesses the mother, who metaphorically says 'no' to the child's desires. The prohibition only comes to be meaningful to the child because there are people – females – who have been castrated in the particular sense that they are without the phallus. It is only, in other words, through 'deferred action' that previous experiences such as the sight of female genitals become significant. Thus, for Freud, contained within the very notion of the castration complex is the theory that other experiences and perceptions only take their meaning from the law for which it stands. In Abraham's work, to the contrary, the threat of castration arises from an actual perception that the child makes about a girl's body: no one intervenes, there is no prohibiting father whose threat is the utterance of a law; here it is the 'real' inferiority of the female genitals that once comprehended initiates the complex in both sexes.

Here, however, within Freud's work, we come across a further and most important contradiction; it was one he did not have time fully to resolve. It is a contradiction that explains subsequent readings of Abraham's and Freud's work as coincident. Freud is clear that the boy's castration complex arises

aphanisis to cover his idea. This notion is not developed in Abraham's work but it did, however, set a future trend. Lacan returns to it, arguing that Jones so nearly hit the mark that his failure is the more grotesque for his near-insight. To Lacan, *aphanisis* relates to the essential division of the subject whereas, he writes, Jones 'mistook it for something rather absurd, the fear of seeing desire disappear. Now *aphanisis* is to be situated in a more radical way at the level at which the subject manifests himself in this movement I describe as lethal. In a quite different way, I have called this movement the *fading* of the subject.' 'The subject appears on the one side as meaning and on the other as *fading* – disappearance (SXI, pp. 189, 199, *pp. 207–8, 218*).

from the penis being given significance from the father's prohibition; but sometimes he suggests that the girl's penis envy comes from a simple perception that she makes; she sees the actual penis, realises it is bigger and better and wants one. Clearly such inequity in girls' and boys' access to meaning is untenable: why should the girl have a privileged relationship to an understanding of the body? In fact there is evidence that Freud was aware of the discrepancy in his account; his published statements tend to be confusing, but in a letter he wrote: 'the sight of the penis and its function of urination cannot be the motive, only the trigger of the child's envy. However, no one has stated this' (Freud, 1935, 1971, p. 329). Unfortunately neither Freud nor any subsequent analyst stated this clearly enough in their published writings.

Freud referred to Abraham's article on the female castration complex (1920) as 'unsurpassed'. But absolutely nothing in the theoretical framework of Freud's writing confirmed Abraham's perspective. Freud certainly talks of the woman's sense of 'organ-inferiority' but this is never for him the *motive* for the castration complex or hence for the dissolution of the Oedipus complex; it is therefore not causative of female sexuality, femininity or neurosis. For Freud the absence of the penis in women is significant only in that it makes meaningful the father's prohibition on incestuous desires. In and of itself, the female body neither indicates nor initiates anything. The implication of the different stress of Freud and Abraham is very far-reaching. If, as in Abraham's work, the actual body is seen as a motive for the constitution of the subject in its male or female sexuality, then an historical or symbolic dimension to this constitution is precluded. Freud's intention was to establish that very dimension as the *sine qua non* of the construction of the human subject. It is on this dimension that Lacan bases his entire account of sexual difference.

If Freud considered that the actual body of the child on its own was irrelevant to the castration complex, so too did he repeatedly argue that the actual situation of the child, the presence or absence of the father, the real prohibition against masturbation and so on, could be insignificant compared with the ineffable presence of a symbolic threat (the 'event') to which one is inevitably subjected as the price of being human. Unable to accept the notion of cultural inheritance, other analysts, agreeing

with Freud that an actual occurrence could not account for the omnipresent castration anxiety they found in their clinical work, had to look elsewhere for an explanation. In all cases, they considered the castration complex not as something essential to the very construction of the human subject but as a fear that arises from the internal experiences of a being who is already, even if only in a primitive form, constituted as a subject. As a consequence, in none of these alternative theories can castration have any fundamental bearing on sexual difference.

Thus Starcke found the prevalence of castration anxiety in the loss of the nipple from the baby's mouth, so that daily weaning accounted for the universality of the complex. As a further instance he proposed the baby's gradual ability to see itself as distinct from the external world: 'The formation of the outer world is the original castration; the withdrawal of the nipple forms the root-conception of this' (Starcke, 1921, p. 180). Franz Alexander and Otto Rank took castration back to the baby's loss of the womb, which was once part of itself. Freud took up his colleague's ideas on separation anxiety (as he termed it) most fully in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* written in 1925, but two years earlier he had added this footnote to the case of Little Hans:

> While recognizing all of these roots of the complex, I have nevertheless put forward the view that the term 'castration complex' ought to be confined to those excitations and consequences which are bound up with the loss of the *penis*. Any one who, in analysing adults, has become convinced of the invariable presence of the castration complex, will of course find difficulty in ascribing its origin to a chance threat – of a kind which is not, after all, of such universal occurrence; he will be driven to assume that children construct this danger for themselves out of the slightest hints . . . (Freud, X, 1909, p. 8, n^2, 1923)

There is a fundamental distinction between recognising that the castration complex may refer back to other separations and actually seeing these separations as castrations. To Freud the castration complex divided the sexes and thus made the human being, human. But this is not to deny the importance of earlier separations. Freud himself had proposed that the loss of the faeces constituted the possibility of a retrospective referral; the

castration complex could use it as a model. Freud's account is retroactive: fearing phallic castration the child may 'recollect' previous losses, castration gives them their relevance. In the other accounts it is these separations that make castration relevant; here the scheme is prospective: early losses make the child fear future ones. For Freud, history and the psychoanalytic experience is always a reconstruction, a retrospective account: the human subject is part of such a history. The other explanations make him grow developmentally. If one takes castration itself back to the womb, then the human subject was there from the outset and it can only follow that what makes him psychotic, neurotic or 'normal' is some arbitrarily selected constitutional factor or some equally arbitrary environmental experience.

Once more, Lacan underlines and reformulates Freud's position. The castration complex is *the* instance of the humanisation of the child in its sexual difference. Certainly it rejoins other severances, in fact it gives them their meaning. If the specific mark of the phallus, the repression of which is the institution of the law, is repudiated then there can only be psychosis. To Lacan all other hypotheses make nonsense of psychoanalysis. For him they once again leave unanswered the question whence the subject originates, and, he asks, what has happened to the language and social order that distinguishes him or her from other mammals – is it to have no effect other than a subsidiary one, on formation? Above all, how can sexual difference be understood within such a developmental perspective?

If it is argued that there is nothing specific about the threat of phallic castration; if birth, weaning, the formation of the outer world are all castrations, then something else has to explain the difference between the sexes. If castration is only one among other separations or is the same as the dread of the loss of sexual desire common to men and women alike (Jones's *aphanisis*), then what distinguishes the two sexes? All the major contributors to this field at this period, whether they supplemented or opposed Freud, found the explanation in a biological predisposition. This is the case with Freud's biologistic defender, Helene Deutsch, as it is with his culturalist opponent, Karen Horney.

The demoting of the castration complex from its key role in the construction of sexual difference, and the subsequent reliance

on biological explanations, was accompanied by a further change. In the mid-twenties the focus of discussion shifted and a new epoch began. The crisis of the concept of the castration complex may well have contributed to a change of emphasis away from itself and towards a preoccupation with female sexuality. When the well-known names associated with the discussion – Horney, Deutsch, Lampl-de Groot, Klein, Jones – join in, their concern is less with the construction of sexual difference than it is with the nature of female sexuality. It is from this time that we can date what has become known as the 'great debate'. The debate was to reach its peak when in 1935, Ernest Jones, invited to Vienna to give some lectures to elucidate the fast growing differences between British and Viennese psychoanalysts, chose as his first (and, as it turned out, only) topic, female sexuality. While female sexuality of course is central to our concerns, we can see that something highly important was lost in the change of emphasis. Retrospectively one can perceive that the reference point is still the distinction between the sexes (the point of the castration complex) but by concentrating on the status and nature of female sexuality, it often happens that this is treated as an isolate, something independent of the distinction that creates it. This tendency is confirmed within the theories of those opposed to Freud. The opposition to Freud saw the concept of the castration complex as derogatory to women. In repudiating its terms they hoped both to elevate women and to explain what women consisted of – a task Freud ruled as psychoanalytically out-of-bounds. But from now on analysts who came in on Freud's side also saw their work in this way. Women, so to speak, had to have something of their own. The issue subtly shifts from what distinguishes the sexes to what has each sex got of value that belongs to it alone. In this context, and in the absence of the determining role of the castration complex, it is inevitable that there is a return to the very biological explanations from which Freud deliberately took his departure – where else could that something else be found?

For Freud it is of course never a question of arguing that anatomy or biology is irrelevant, it is a question of assigning them their place. He gave them a place – it was outside the field of psychoanalytic enquiry. Others put them firmly within it. Thus Carl Müller-Braunschweig, assuming, as did others, that there was an innate masculinity and femininity which corresponded directly with the biological male and female, wrote of a 'masculine and feminine id'. There is now not only an original masculinity and femininity but a natural heterosexuality. In 1926, Karen Horney spoke of the 'biological principle of heterosexual attraction' and argued from this that the girl's so-called masculine phase is a defence against her primary feminine anxiety that her father will violate her. Melanie Klein elaborated the increasingly prevalent notion that because of her primordial infantile feminine sexuality, the girl has an unconscious knowledge of the vagina. This naturalist perspective, exemplified in the work of Ernest Jones, posits a primary femininity for the girl based on her biological sex which then suffers vicissitudes as a result of fantasies brought into play by the girl's relations to objects. The theorists of this position do not deny Freud's notion that the girl has a phallic phase, but they argue that it is only a reaction-formation against her natural feminine attitude. It is a secondary formation, a temporary state in which the girl takes refuge when she feels her femininity is in danger. Just as the boy with his natural male valuation of his penis fears its castration, so the girl with her natural femininity will fear the destruction of her insides through her father's rape. The presence or absence of early vaginal sensations becomes a crucial issue in this context – a context in which impulses themselves, in a direct and unmediated way, produce psychological characteristics. Freud argued strenuously against such a position. In a letter that, read in this context, is not as cryptic as it at first appears, he wrote to Müller-Braunschweig:

> I object to all of you (Horney, Jones, Rado, etc.,) to the extent that you do not distinguish more clearly and cleanly between what is psychic and what is biological, that you try to establish a neat parallelism between the two and that you, motivated by such intent, unthinkingly construe psychic facts which are unprovable and that you, in the process of doing so, must declare as reactive or regressive much that without doubt is primary. Of course, these reproaches must remain obscure. In addition, I would only like to emphasize that we must keep psychoanalysis separate from biology just as we have kept it separate from anatomy and physiology . . . (Freud, 1935, 1971, p. 329) . . .

However, there were those opponents of Freud's position who did not want to lean too heavily or too explicitly on a biological explanation of sexual difference; instead they stressed the significance of the psychological mechanism of identification with its dependence on an object. In both Freud's account and those of these object-relations theorists, after the resolution of the Oedipus complex, each child hopefully identifies with the parent of the appropriate sex. The explanations look similar – but the place accorded to the castration complex pushes them poles apart. In Freud's schema, after the castration complex, boys and girls will more or less adequately adopt the sexual identity of the appropriate parent. But it is always only an adoption and a precarious one at that, as long ago, Dora's 'inappropriate' paternal identification had proved. For Freud, identification with the appropriate parent is a *result* of the castration complex which has already given the mark of sexual distinction. For other analysts, dispensing with the key role of the castration complex, identification (with a biological prop) is the *cause* of sexual difference. Put somewhat reductively, the position of these theorists can be elucidated thus: there is a period when the girl is undifferentiated from the boy (for Klein and some others, this is the boy's primary feminine phase) and hence both love and identify with their first object, the mother; then, as a result of her biological sex (her femininity) and because her love has been frustrated on account of her biological inadequacy (she has not got the phallus for her mother and never will have), the little girl enters into her own Oedipus complex and loves her father; she then fully re-identifies with her mother and achieves her full feminine identity.

It can be seen from this that the question of female sexuality was itself crucial in the development of object-relations theory. This understanding of femininity put a heavy stress on the first maternal relationship; the same emphasis has likewise characterised the whole subsequent expansion of object-relations theory. When the 'great debate' evaporated, object-relations theorists concentrated attention on the mother and the sexually undifferentiated child, leaving the problem of sexual distinction as a subsidiary that is somehow not bound up with the very formation of the subject. This is the price paid for the reorientation to the mother, and the neglect of the father, whose prohibition in Freud's theory, alone can represent the mark that

distinguishes boys and girls. The mother herself in these accounts has inherited a great deal of the earlier interest in female sexuality – her own experiences, the experiences of her, have been well documented, but she is already constituted – in all her uncertainty – as a female subject. This represents an interesting avoidance of the question of sexual difference.

Freud acknowledged his serious inadequacies in the area of the mother–child relationship. In fact his blindness was dictated not so much by his personal inclinations or his own masculinity – as he and others suggested – but by the nature of psychoanalysis as he conceived it. To Freud, if psychoanalysis is phallocentric, it is because the human social order that it perceives refracted through the individual human subject is patrocentric. To date, the father stands in the position of the third term that *must* break the asocial dyadic unit of mother and child. We can see that this third term will always need to be represented by something or someone. Lacan returns to the problem, arguing that the relation of mother and child cannot be viewed outside the structure established by the position of the father. To Lacan, a theory that ignores the father or sees him embodied within the mother (Klein) or through her eyes, is nonsense. There can be nothing *human* that pre-exists or exists outside the law represented by the father; there is only either its denial (psychosis) or the fortunes and misfortunes ('normality' and neurosis) of its terms. Ultimately for Kleinian and non-Kleinian object-relations theorists (despite the great differences between them) the distinction between the sexes is not the result of a division but a fact that is already given; men and women, males and females, *exist*. There is no surprise here.

The debate with his colleagues also led Freud himself to make some crucial reformulations. Again these can be said to stem from his stress on the castration complex. Time and again in the last papers of his life he underscored its significance. In rethinking his belief that the boy and the girl both had a phallic phase that was primary, and not, as others argued, reactive and secondary, he re-emphasised, but more importantly, reformulated his earlier positions. The Oedipus complex as he had originally conceived it led to what he considered the impasses and mistakes of the arguments he opposed. The natural heterosexuality it assumed was untenable but its simple reversal with its stress on the first maternal relation was equally unsatisfactory.

Without an ultimate reliance on a biologically induced identificatory premise, such a position does not account for the difference between the boy and the girl. Lacan would argue that it is at this juncture that Freud – his earlier positions now seen to be leading in false directions – brings forward the concept of desire. 'What', asks Freud, 'does the woman [the little girl] want?' All answers to the question, including 'the mother' are false: she simply *wants*. The phallus – with its status as potentially absent – comes to stand in for the necessarily *missing* object of desire at the level of sexual division. If this is so, the Oedipus complex can no longer be a static myth that reflects the real situation of father, mother and child, it becomes a structure revolving around the question of where a person can be placed in relation to his or her desire. That 'where' is determined by the castration complex.

In his 1933 essay 'Femininity', Freud puts forward the solutions of his opponents on the issue of female sexuality as a series of questions. He asks 'how does [the little girl] pass from her masculine phase to the feminine one to which she is biologically destined?' (Freud, XXII, 1933, p. 119) and contrary to the answers of his opponents, he concludes that: 'the constitution will not adapt itself to its function without a struggle' (Freud, XXII, 1933, p. 117) and that though 'It would be a solution of ideal simplicity if we could suppose that from a particular age onwards the elementary influence of the mutual attraction between the sexes makes itself felt and impels the small woman towards men . . . we are not going to find things so easy . . .' (Freud, XXII, 1933, p. 119). The biological female is destined to become a woman, but the question to which psychoanalysis must address itself, is *how*, if she does manage this, is it to happen? His colleagues' excellent work on the earliest maternal relationship, from a psychoanalytic point of view, leaves unanswered the problem of sexual differentiation. As Freud puts it: 'Unless we can find something that is specific for girls and is not present or not in the same way present in boys, we shall not have explained the termination of the attachment of girls to their mother. I believe we have found this specific factor . . . in the castration complex' (Freud, 1933, p. 124).

Freud ended his life with an unfinished paper: 'Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence' (XXIII, 1940). It is about the castration complex and its implication for the construction of the subject. It describes the formation of the ego in a moment of danger (of threatened loss) which results in a primary split from which it never recovers. Freud offers the reaction to the castration complex when a fetish is set up as its alternative, as an exemplary instance of this split. In this paper we can see clearly the position of Freud's to which Lacan is to return. A primordially split subject necessitates an originally lost object. Though Freud does not talk of the object as a lost object as Lacan does, he is absolutely clear that its psychological significance arises from its absence, or as he put it in the essay on 'Femininity' from the fact that it could never satisfy: '. . . the child's avidity for its earliest nourishment is altogether insatiable . . . it never gets over the pain of losing its mother's breast' (Freud, XXII, 1933, p. 122). Even the tribal child, breastfed well beyond infancy, is unsatisfied: pain and lack of satisfaction are the point, the triggers that evoke desire.

Freud's final writings are often perceived as reflecting an old man's despair. But for Lacan their pessimism indicates a clarification and summation of a theory whose implications are and must be, anti-humanist. The issue of female sexuality always brings us back to the question of how the human subject is constituted. In the theories of Freud that Lacan redeploys, the distinction between the sexes brought about by the castration complex and the different positions that must subsequently be taken up, confirms that the subject is split and the object is lost. This is the difficulty at the heart of being human to which psychoanalysis and the objects of its enquiry – the unconscious and sexuality – bear witness. To Lacan, a humanist position offers only false hopes on the basis of false theories.

It is a matter of perspective – and Lacan would argue that the perspective of post-Freudian analysts is ideological in that it confirms the humanism of our times. In the view of Kleinians and other object-relations theorists, whether it is with a primitive ego or as an initial fusion with the mother from which differentiation gradually occurs, the perspective starts from an identification with what seems to be, or ought to be, the subject. The problem these theorists address is: what does the baby/person do with its world in order for it to develop? Then the question is inverted: has the human environment been good enough for the baby to be able to do the right things? In these accounts a sexual identity is first given biologically and then developed and con-

firmed (or not) as the subject grows through interaction with th
real objects and its fantasies of them, on its complicated road t
maturity.

Lacan takes the opposite perspective: the analysand's un
conscious reveals a fragmented subject of shifting and uncertai
sexual identity. To be human is to be subjected to a law which de
centres and divides: sexuality is created in a division, the subjec
is split; but an ideological world conceals this from the conscious
subject who is supposed to feel whole and certain of a sexua
identity. Psychoanalysis should aim at a destruction of thi
concealment and at a reconstruction of the subject's constructio
in all its splits. This may be an accurate theory, it is certainly
precarious project. It is to this theory and project – the history o
the fractured sexual subject – that Lacan dedicates himself.